



# **Large Jail Network Bulletin**



# Sharing Information Via the Internet: A Large Jail Network Mailing List

**by Eric Miller,  
Project Manager, Justice  
Management Division,  
U.S. Department of Justice,  
and Sharla Rausch, Ph.D.,  
Senior Research Analyst, NIC**

**T**he idea for this initiative originated with Art Wallenstein, Ring County, Washington, who asked NIC to identify how the Internet could be used for sharing information among members of the Large Jail Network (LJN). Sharla Rausch, NIC, and Eric Miller, U.S. Department of Justice, met with the Jails Committee at the February 1996 NIC Advisory Board Meeting to discuss the LJN's specific communication needs.

As a result of that discussion, the "mailing list" was identified as the best vehicle for sharing information among members. For the June LJN meeting, Eric and Sharla were asked to summarize the features of mailing lists and what LJN members would need in order to participate in a LJN mailing list. The following is based on the report presented at that meeting.

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## What is a Mailing List?

A mailing list is an "alias" on the Internet that, in this case, will represent the LJN. Because it contains the e-mail addresses of all LJN participants, any message sent to this alias will automatically go to all LJN members. The mailing list can offer the following advantages:

- LJN members can use it to discuss important issues, share information, and post notices-all done instantly.
- Special topics mailing lists can easily be created for subgroups of LJN members who are especially interested in a particular subject.
- LJN members will also be able to send messages to individuals-not the whole group-by using a personal e-mail address.

Because this mailing list will be private, not public, a list administrator will be responsible for adding and removing addresses. This function can be performed by DOJ staff, unless LJN members would prefer it to be administered elsewhere.

## Technology Needed to Communicate via an LJN Mailing List

In order to participate in the mailing list, you do not need access to the World Wide Web, nor do you need a graphical Web Browser such as Netscape or Mosaic. You do need access to the Internet and the hardware and software.

### 1. Access to an Internet account.

- **Possible free sources:** Internet accounts are often available through your local, municipal, county, or state government. If your facility has a local area network (LAN) with electronic mail software, it may already have a gateway connection that will permit you to communicate with the Internet. To find out, ask your LAN administrator. If your jurisdiction does not offer Internet service, check with nearby colleges and universities to see if you or your facility can obtain an account from them.
- **Commercial sources:** Your agency also can obtain an account from a commercial *internet service provider*. These accounts cost between \$12 and \$30 per month, with varying billing plans. For instance, some services charge a flat monthly rate and others bill for time used. You can also send and

receive electronic mail from any **on-line service** that advertises that it can exchange mail with the Internet. America Online and CompuServ are examples of such services. They tend to be more expensive than the "pure" Internet access accounts.

**2. A personal computer (PC), modem, and communications software.** The relative power of the PC, the type of communications software, and the speed of the modem determine the kind of service subscription you will get.

- **Shell account.** The most basic (and often the cheapest) is called a "shell account." This type of access is often called "character mode" because you can see only characters on your computer screen, not graphics or pictures. For this kind of access, almost any PC will work. You will need to find out from your service provider what kind of terminal your computer must emulate (or look like) to be compatible with its service. With that information, you can purchase the terminal emulation software, usually for less than \$100. A relatively slow modem will work fairly well on this type of service, as the characters being sent to the computer do not require as much speed as graphics and pictures. A modem that operates at 9600 baud will provide good service and should be available for between \$100 and \$200.

- **Commercial on-line service.** For these services (such as America Online and CompuServ), you will generally need a PC capable of running Windows (and you will need a copy of the Windows software). A faster modem will be needed to handle the graphics that this kind of connection is capable of providing—the faster the better. At present, the fastest modems in mass production run at a speed of 28800 baud and cost from \$200 to \$500. The good news is that the service provider will make the necessary software available as part of your subscription.

- **Full Internet account.** For a full Internet account, you will need equipment similar to that for a commercial on-line service. Ask the service provider if it will provide the necessary software; many do. Because configuring this kind of connection can be more difficult, be sure to ask about technical support. Some service providers will install the software if you bring your PC to their shop.

### What's Involved in Using the LJN Mailing List to Communicate?

**1. Electronic mail address.** With any of the services described above, you will receive an electronic mail address. This is generally in the form **username@organization.dom**. Your individual user name appears to the left of the @ symbol and the name of the Internet computer (to which you

connect) appears to the right of the symbol.

**2. Creation of the LJN mailing list.** To create the mailing list, the mailing list administrator will collect the e-mail addresses of all participating members. Only those addresses that are included in the LJN mailing list will receive or have access to the information sent over the Internet.

**3. Sending and receiving mail.** Techniques for sending and receiving mail vary with each service provider. Your service provider should provide instructions on how to use the software on its system.

The LJN mailing list will be assigned its own mailing address, which will be in the same form as a personal address. The computer will automatically translate this into a message to be sent to each individual member of the LJN mailing list. After reading incoming messages from the list, you can simply reply to the message, and your reply will be "broadcast" to all members of the group. If it is more appropriate, you can specify one or more personal mail addresses. Or, as noted above, if participants are interested in having separate mailing lists for different subgroups or topics, these can be easily created.

For further information contact Sharla Rausch, Ph.D., Senior Research Analyst, National Institute of Corrections; telephone (800) 995-6423, ext. 114. ■

